

SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

775 Apart from the very faint hint which these last may give us there is nothing to suggest a deity or any supernatural being of independent existence, least of all a high-god. I do not know of any cosmogony, and there is no attribution of divine powers to the phenomena of nature. On the whole it will be found that Orokaiva religion concerns itself primarily with the spirits of the dead.

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In any one tribe the beliefs regarding the *sovai* are found to be confused and conflicting to the last degree, and it will be as well for the sake of clarity to set down several conceptions immediately.

(1) The *sovai* is sometimes conceived of as immaterial but retaining human characteristics. (2) It is also conceived of as taking the concrete form of beast, bird, reptile, or fish. (3) It is also conceived of as a semi-human monster of altogether frightful disposition inhabiting the bush; or in this case it might be nearer the truth to say that there are imaginary monsters (fiends, hobgoblins) to whom the name *sovai* is extended, and who are thus identified with spirits of the dead. (4) Fourthly, there are a few instances in which the *sovai* are known by personal names and, apart from their constant appearance in legends, are thought of as still actually existing.

No native, I fancy, would fail to endorse any of the above propositions, nor does he find any difficulty in holding all these beliefs simultaneously. He pictures the *sovai* as ghost, animal, or hobgoblin, and it depends entirely upon his mood or the subject of the conversation which of the three pictures will be on view. It is not to be supposed that he would make a rigorous choice and so definitely and permanently make up his mind as to the real nature of the *sovai*. His conception of it is as kaleidoscopic as his emotions, and changes form and colour as he ranges between affection, distaste, and fear.

*Transition from Living Man to 'Sovai'*

It is definitely asserted that a man becomes a *sovai* at death, but there seems to be no satisfactory theory regarding the transition. It is very tempting for a European to put a